

The Stage Art of Komisarjevsky

AN EXHIBITION IN THE HARVARD THEATRE COLLECTION



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Theodore Komisarjevsky (London, ca. 1934). Photograph by Maurice Beck and Helen MacGregor.



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CATALOG BY
CATHERINE J. JOHNSON

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The Stage Art of Theodore Komisarjevsky: An Exhibition in the Harvard Theatre Collection

Catherine J. Johnson

AN INTRODUCTION BY
ERNESTINE STODELLE KOMISARJEVSKY CHAMBERLAIN

It is my sincere hope that the Harvard Theatre Collection's exhibition of my late husband's contributions to the twentieth-century theatre in the form of stage designs, scripts, photographs, and various background material for the plays and the operas he produced in Russia, France, Italy, England, and the United States will provide the viewer with a vivid sense of the man as a gifted artist whose vision of an ideal "synthetic Theatre" was achieved through his own creative energies.

But beyond the unusual fact that Theodore Komisarjevsky was personally capable of fulfilling the multiple needs of his stage conceptions, there is an indisputable logic in his vision of a "synthetic theatre." The word "synthetic" is used in the Hegelian sense whereby all the elements of a production—visual, aural, and dynamic—become *synthesized*, or, in Komisarjevsky's own words, "united harmoniously into a single artistic demonstration," that demonstration being the director's expression of the work's "inner rhythm, spirit, and ideology."

It was my good fortune to be involved in several professional capacities in my late husband's career from 1935 onward: first, as a co-author of a play; then as research assistant in matters concerning details of his productions; as a demonstrator of acting and dance techniques on his lecture tour of the eastern United States in 1938; and, later, when he established a school of acting in New York City, as a teacher of movement courses. On his part, Komisarjevsky supported my choreographic and performing efforts by designing costumes for my dances and encouraging me in my teaching and writing efforts.

For me, in retrospect, the most exciting collaborative experience I shared with my husband was trying to solve a technical problem posed in *The Comedy of Errors*, which he had been invited to produce at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon in the spring of 1938. We were still in America winding up our lecture tour, and "Komy" had already begun to design the production in a style that departed radically from the conventional Greek interpretation. His décor was that of a Mediterranean town of unidentifiable nationality, with the inhabitants wearing fanciful concoctions of various period styles, some of which were inspired by dolls in our possession.

The dilemma confronting Komisarjevsky lay in the fact that the mistaken identities of the double set of twins—Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse and their respective Dromios—were due entirely to the droll situation that each set of twins was dressed exactly alike, in spite of the fact that Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse had just arrived in Ephesus. Ordinarily, in a Greek version, the ubiquitous toga solved this problem. How, then, to devise the means whereby the Syracuse twins could become the “spittin’ images” of their Ephesian brothers?

Working on the problem jointly in the spirit of the comedy’s farcical imaginings, we inserted a preliminary mimed scene shortly after the curtain rose on the morning of the day in which the grand confusion took place. The shops in the square were just opening for business when the two strangers, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse, appeared in rather unkempt clothes after their long travels. Right in front of them, to their surprise, they found a tailor shop with a rack of good-looking suits. With the charming strains of a Handel Concerto Grosso setting the mood for a stylistically mimed scene, the two strangers carefully selected new clothes, joyfully paid the tailor, and marched out proudly wearing their new garments. From that moment on, the comic dilemma of the mistaken identities took over, for Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse were wearing the same clothes as their twin brothers!

Other collaborative experiences were likewise alive with the sense of discovery. I am especially grateful even now for my husband’s suggestion that I compose a dance in homage to Isadora Duncan—an idea that never would have entered my mind, for I revered the great American dancer and would have considered it sacrilegious to try to interpret her art in my own way. But Komy’s insistence that I try to choreograph such an homage gave me courage, and the dance premiered in 1939 in Paris. The costume he designed for me with its voluminous scarf is in the exhibition.

Thus does the past enrich the present.

KOMISARJEVSKY IN LONDON: A REMINISCENCE BY PHILLADA SEWELL

To be in a Komisarjevsky production was an unforgettable experience. This truly amazing man, who possessed about twenty times the vitality of ordinary mortals, not only directed his productions but designed the scenery and the dresses. Before rehearsals started he knew exactly what movements, grouping, and lighting he wanted. If something was not right, a dress rehearsal could go on well into the small hours. And if clothes were wrong—God help the wardrobe!

But in rehearsal, once the scenes were set, Komisarjevsky would sit quietly in the stalls and let the actors get on with it.

Once in a while he would take an actor aside and walk up and down the stage with him, talking all the time, for about ten minutes. The transformation in the actor’s performance was staggering. “What did you say to him?” I asked once.

“I can’t tell you,” he replied.

The finished productions were like symphonies—everything joined in a miraculous whole. One eminent critic wrote, “There is a wind that blows through every Komisarjevsky production.”

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

The theatrical career of Theodore Komisarjevsky (1882-1954) spanned three continents and engaged him in all aspects of stage production. He was director and producer, stage and costume designer, translator and adaptor of plays, teacher of acting and directing, designer of cinema interiors, director of films, and theorist and author of theatrical treatises. A truly universal man of the theatre, his eclecticism influenced all his productions.

The son of a tenor for the Imperial Opera of St. Petersburg and half brother of the great Russian actress Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, Theodore Komisarjevsky was educated at a military academy, studied architecture in St. Petersburg, and earned a doctor of philosophy. He intended to become an architect but the theatrical pull of his ancestry was strong. In 1906, he became scenic director of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya's Dramatic Theatre on Ofitserskaya Street in St. Petersburg, then under the artistic direction of Vsevolod Meyerhold.

The ideas of new artistic voices filled the Russian theatre world of the early twentieth century. The Moscow Art Theatre propounded a new style of psychological realism in its method acting. Serge Diaghilev's art review *Mir Iskusstva* sought a new form of visual representation. His Ballets Russes productions advanced the art of stage decoration with the colorful, stylized designs of Bakst, Dobuzhinsky, Goncharova, and Benois. Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gorky, Gogol, Andreyev, and Ostrovsky provided a strong body of modern plays for the Russian stage, supplemented by the works of the European writers Maeterlinck and Ibsen. Meanwhile, proponents of non-realistic theatre led by Meyerhold were developing theories of a symbolic stage.

In this rich climate Komisarjevsky began his work at Vera Kommissarzhevskaya's theatre. He carefully examined the prevailing contemporary artistic values from which he developed his own eclectic theory of a "synthetic" theatre emphasizing harmony of production elements and stressing the importance of décor.

From its beginnings in Russia, the career of Theodore Komisarjevsky is revealed in the extensive collection of documents given to the Harvard Theatre Collection by his widow, Ernestine Stodelle Chamberlain. The exhibition, mounted August through October 1989, was based on those papers, along with additional materials loaned by members of the Komisarjevsky family. The checklist follows the order of the exhibition and entries are listed under the chronological section in which they were displayed.

THE RUSSIAN YEARS (1906-1919)

Komisarjevsky worked in the theatre of his sister Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, the Kommissarzhevskaya Dramatic Theatre, from 1906 until her death from smallpox in 1910. At the time she died, Komisarjevsky was in the midst of producing his first play outside her theatre, George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. From 1910 to 1911, Komisarjevsky collaborated with Nikolai Evreinov, with whom he had worked at the Kommissarzhevskaya Dramatic Theatre, to form the short-lived "Gay Theatre" or "Merry Theatre for Grown-up Children"; it performed a repertory of what Komisarjevsky called "amusing one-acts." In 1910, Komisarjevsky was appointed producer of Mos-

Number 3. Portrait of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, Theodore Komisarjevsky's half sister, as Nora in *A Doll's House*, wearing a costume designed by Komisarjevsky.



cow's Nezlobin Dramatic Theatre where he averaged a production a month for three years. His work there included the first Russian productions of Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, the first part of Goethe's *Faust*, Carlo Gozzi's *Turandot*, and Komisarjevsky's own adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, which he produced without sets. In 1914, Komisarjevsky founded both a small 150-seat theatre in a remodelled town house and a school of theatrical arts to train "universal actors." The theatre, named the Vera Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre, in honor of his late sister, was one of the four theatres he managed in Russia prior

to his expatriation in 1919. During his career in Russia he served as director of the Free School of Scenic Art (1910–1919), director of the Maly and Bolshoi theatres in Moscow (1913–1914), artistic director of the Moscow Opera House (1914–1919), director of the Vera Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre (1914–1918), and managing director and producer of the Bolshoi Ballet and Opera (1918–1919).

Anguished over the widespread poverty resulting from the Revolution, and frustrated over the Bolshevik government's policy of entrusting the management of theatres to committees of theatrical employees, Komisarjevsky left Russia in 1919. He made his way west via Warsaw and Paris, eventually arriving in London.

The Russian theatre during the time of Komisarjevsky's work embraced experimentation, albeit of two distinct varieties. Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre sought realism, to be attained in part via the actor's "method," i.e. psychological preparation for the role. The Symbolists favored non-realistic modes. Theodore Komisarjevsky spent his first years in the theatre working with the Symbolists, most notably Meyerhold, but when he replaced Meyerhold as the artistic director of the Kommissarzhevskaya Dramatic Theatre, he tried to forge a theatre that united the symbolic approach with a focus on the actor as more than a symbolist's tool.

Eventually Komisarjevsky rejected the ideas of both Meyerhold and Stanislavsky and followed his own idiosyncratic and eclectic method. Indeed, Komisarjevsky was called by some "the most eclectic of Russian directors." His productions combined music, words, movement, and the visual arts to present colorful, stylized theatre. In *Myself and the Theatre* he set forth his views on combining the various theatrical arts:

This division of the art of the Theatre into drama, opera and ballet is purely artificial and enforced, and perfection in Theatrical art can be achieved only by a synthetic union of the drama, opera, and ballet in one single show, in which each of these would be the complement of the other, which would be performed by an ensemble of universal actors.

Komisarjevsky brought to each of his productions a great interest in the text, for he believed that the director should serve the author through sympathetic interpretation. That meant a varying directorial approach with each author and work.

Called by Russian theatrical historian N. M. Gorchakov "the most profound thinker of all the pre-Revolutionary innovators," the full extent of his innovation has not yet been thoroughly examined. His influence has, however, been recognized, particularly in the work of Aleksandr Tairov and Evgenii Vakhtangov.

An artist and trained architect, Komisarjevsky emphasized the visual style of his productions by himself designing the costumes and settings for many of the plays he directed. A manifesto on décor is part of his theory of a "synthetic theatre," outlined in *Myself and the Theatre*:

To make a fully harmonious impression on the audience a Synthetic Theatre requires something entirely new in the matter of décor—something dynamic in place of what is at present static The dynamic décor of the Synthetic Theatre should be in harmony with the music and the ensemble of performers. Even in a production of a play without music the rhythm of the stage action should reflect itself in the surroundings The décor must be in dynamic harmony with the

acting and should be made to change, if not always its forms . . . at least the colors and effects of light and shade The rhythm of the music must be in harmony with the rhythm of the words, with the rhythm of the movements of the actors, of the colours and lines of the décor and costumes, and of the changing lights. The reaction on the spectator of musical acting must be strengthened by this synthetic environment.

Though his ideas were informed by the work of Richard Wagner, Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, and Meyerhold, Komisarjevsky rejected the concept that the actor is merely an element of the décor or a puppet controlled by the master mind of the artist director. Rather, he wished to develop a multi-faceted or "universal" actor who would sing, dance, speak, emote, and appear as an object of art.

The Family of Komisarjevsky

1. Portrait of Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky, Sr., father of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya and Theodore Komisarjevsky (n.d.). Photomechanical print. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
2. Portrait of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya (St. Petersburg, 1905). Photograph.
3. Vera Kommissarzhevskaya as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (St. Petersburg, ca. 1905). Photograph. Costume designed by Theodore Komisarjevsky.

4. *V. F. Kommissarzhevskaja: Al'bom solntsa Rossii* (Petrograd: s.n., n.d.).

A picture album depicting Vera in many of her famous roles, including the title role of Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice*, one of her greatest. The production was among the most successful Meyerhold/Kommissarzhevskaya collaborations. Theodore Komisarjevsky designed costumes for the production during his first season with his sister's theatre.

5. Facade of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya's Dramatic Theatre on Ofitserskaya Street in Leningrad in 1984. Photograph. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

The original theatre, closed before Kommissarzhevskaya's death in 1910, reopened in 1954.

Scenes from Productions of the Russian Years

6. Scene of Valentin's death in part 1 of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (Nezlobin Theatre, Moscow, 1912). Photograph.
7. Scene from part 1 of Goethe's *Faust* (Nezlobin Theatre, Moscow, 1912). Photograph.

Komisarjevsky's own production of Goethe's *Faust* was apparently inspired by Georg Fuchs's production at the Munich Art Theater, which Komisarjevsky saw and recounted in his *Theatre and a Changing Civilization*:

Impressive because of its simplicity, Professor Erler, who was responsible for the settings and the brightly coloured "posterlike" costumes, used only plain blackcloths. In addition to these backings, he had two massive movable "walls" on which grey stones were painted, and which represented alternatively Faust's study, Auerbach's cellar, the Church, the prison, etc. The suggestive effects of scenes were completed by the use of three-dimensional details, such as columns, statues, a



few pieces of furniture, etc., and particularly by ingenious lighting effects which brought out the plastic qualities of the actors and their environment.

Number 6. Scene of Valentin's death in part 1 of Goethe's *Faust* (Moscow, 1912).

Like Fuchs, Komisarjevsky used movable walls on which grey stones were painted, adding three-dimensional details to create different scenes.

8. Scenes from the ballet *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo (Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre, Moscow, ca. 1917–1919). 2 photographs.
9. Scenes from *Tales of Hoffmann* by Jacques Offenbach (Moscow, 1918). 2 photographs.

For *Tales of Hoffmann*, Komisarjevsky positioned a group of students on a platform to listen to the performance and occasionally engage in the action. The character of E. T. A. Hoffmann himself played the piano, set on another platform. Greatly praised for this staging, Komisarjevsky used a similar technique in his 1923 production of *La Duenna* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris.

10. Scenes from *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare (Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre, Moscow, ca. 1918–1919). 4 photographs.



Number 8. The curtain call for Komisarjevsky's production of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (Moscow, ca. 1917-1919).

11. Scene from *The Marriage of Figaro* by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (Moscow, 1919). Photograph.

12. Scenes from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, opera by Otto Nicolai (Moscow, 1918). 6 photographs.

Costume Designs for Nicolai's Opera The Merry Wives of Windsor (Moscow, 1918).

13. Costume design for Dr. Caius. Watercolor, gouache, and pencil on board; 30.3 x 22.9 cm.

14. Costume designs for Dr. Caius and Mistress Page. Pencil; 33 x 27 cm.

15. Costume design for two "Cochers". Watercolor and pencil on board; 30 x 23 cm.

Komisarjevsky's Writings on the Theatre

16. *Tvorchestvo aktera i teoriia Stanislavskago*, Svobodnoe iskusstvo, vypusk 5 (Petrograd: [Teatr i Iskusstvo, n.d.]).

Theodore Komisarjevsky's *The Actor's Work and Stanislavsky's Theory*, heavily emended in pencil in Komisarjevsky's hand.



17. *Entsiklopediia Sŕsenicheskago Samoobrazovaniia. Kostium* (Petrograd: Teatr i Iskusstvo, [n.d.]).

Komisarjevsky's much-used and much-travelled copy of his encyclopedia of costumes.

18. *Teatral'nyiã preliûdii* (Moscow, [s.n.] 1916).

Number 13. Komisarjevsky's costume design for Dr. Caius in Nicolai's operatic version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Moscow, 1918). Watercolor, gouache and pencil on board.

19. *Myself and the Theatre* (New York: E.P. Dutton [1930]).

This title, along with the next, outlines Komisarjevsky's ideas on theatre.

20. *The Theatre and a Changing Civilization* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1935).

ITINERANT PRODUCER: CABARET AND OPERA IN EUROPE (1920-1927)

When Komisarjevsky arrived in London in 1919, he first found work in staging the opera *Prince Igor* at Covent Garden. Then, with his fellow Russian expatriate Vladimir Rosing, he produced a series of "Russian Evenings" under the auspices of a British artistic organization, the Russian Musical Dramatic Art Society, known as Lahda. The following year he staged Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* with Lahda. Throughout the twenties, Komisarjevsky developed a new career in England and the Continent, and in the United States as well, where he staged a season for New York's Theatre Guild. In France and Italy, he focused on the musical and operatic, and in collaboration with George Annenkov opened the club L'Arc-en-Ciel where they produced a cabaret evening with entertainment similar to Nikita Baliev's *Chauve-Souris*. (Komisarjevsky later worked with Baliev in London, staging a section of *Queen of Spades* during one of Baliev's British tours.) Komisarjevsky also collaborated with Jacques Hubertôt at his Théâtre des Champs Elysées, staging several productions, including *Le Club des Canards Mandarins* by Henri Duvernois and Pascal Fortuny, and *La Duenna* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan in November 1923. Both were light-hearted pieces well suited to Komisarjevsky's directorial and decorative style.

London

21. Portrait of Theodore Komisarjevsky (London, ca. 1934). Photograph by Maurice Beck and Helen MacGregor. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
22. Roger Furse (1903-1973). Portrait of Theodore Komisarjevsky during his years in London (ca. 1930-1934). Pencil; 38 x 30.5 cm.
23. Program for *Sister Beatrice* (Russian Musical Dramatic Art Society, Aeolian Hall, London, 4-5 June 1920).

Among the first productions Komisarjevsky mounted in London was *Sister Beatrice*, which had been one of his sister's greatest roles and her most successful collaboration with Meyerhold. Komisarjevsky's staging also received favorable reviews.

Turin

24. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). *Così Fan Tutte* (Leipzig: Universal-Edition [n.d.]). Komisarjevsky's annotated score for his Teatro di Torino production, 1927.
25. Scene II from *Così Fan Tutte* (Teatro di Torino, Turin, Italy, April-May 1927). Photograph.



Number 22. Pencil portrait of Theodore Komisarjevsky by Roger Furse (1903-1973).

26. Scene from Act II, *Fata Malerba* (Teatro di Torino, Turin, Italy, April-May 1927). Photograph.

27. Programs for the Teatro di Torino (Turin, Italy, April-May 1927).

Paris

28. Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816). *La Duegne*, adaptation française nouvelle de Theodore Komisarjevsky; musique de Voldemar Bernardi (1923). Typescript translation of *La Duenna* with manuscript annotations by Komisarjevsky in French and Russian.

29. Mlle de Cazalis in the title role of *La Duenna* by Sheridan (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris, 1923). Photograph by Henri Manuel.

The composer, Voldemar Bernardi, is shown on stage at the piano.



Number 29. Komisarjevsky's staging of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *La Duenna* (Paris, 1923). Photograph by Henri Manuel.

30. Costume design for Mlle de Cazalis in the title role of *La Duenna* by Sheridan (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris, October, 1923). Gouache and pencil; 36.5 x 25.5 cm.
31. Costume design for the role of Carlos in *La Duenna* by Sheridan (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris, October, 1923). Gouache and pencil; 37 x 23 cm.
32. Costume design for Orchide in *Le Club des Canards Mandarins* by Henri Duvernois and Pascal Fortuny (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Studio, Paris, 1923). Gouache and pencil; 31.4 x 25 cm.
33. Costume designs for "jeune fille choriste" in *Le Coq d'Or*, an unrealized production designed for Jacques Hubertôt (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris, 1923). Watercolor and pencil; 32 x 24 cm. Loan of Christopher P. A. Komisarjevsky.
34. Costume design for King Dodon in *Le Coq d'Or*, an unrealized production designed for Jacques Hubertôt (Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris, 1923). Gouache and pencil; 30.5 x 23 cm. Loan of Dana Perez.



Number 30. Komisarjevsky's costume design for the title role of *La Duenna* (Paris, 1923). Gouache and pencil.

35. Program for *L'Arc-en-Ciel* (Paris, 1925). Cover designed by George Annenkov.
36. Costume design for "*4 petits nègres*" (*L'Arc-en-Ciel*, Paris, 1925). Gouache and pencil; 30 x 24 cm. Loan of Christopher P. A. Komisarjevsky.
37. Costume design for "*4 Bouffons*" (*L'Arc-en-Ciel*, Paris, 1925). Gouache and pencil; 30 x 24 cm. Loan of Benedict L. N. Komisarjevsky.

Number 32. Costume design by Komisarjevsky for *Orchide* in *Le Club des Canards Mandarins* (Paris, 1923). Gouache and pencil.



38. Costume designs for two satyrs (*L'Arc-en-Ciel*, Paris, 1925). Watercolor and pencil; 28 x 23 cm. Loan of Benedict L. N. Komisarjevsky.
39. Rendering of stage setting designed by Lesley Blanch and Theodore Komisarjevsky for Domenico Cimarosa's opera *Giannina e Bernardone* (Théâtre Pigalle, Paris, n.d.). Watercolor and pencil; 31 x 40.5 cm. Loan of Christopher P. A. Komisarjevsky.

KOMISARJEVSKY AND THE THEATRE GUILD (1922-1923)

In 1922, Komisarjevsky travelled to New York at the invitation of Lawrence Langner to direct the Theatre Guild's 1922-1923 season. In an interview with the British press, Langner was asked why he had hired the

Russian director. He replied that no less a critic than George Bernard Shaw had pronounced Komisarjevsky the "best director in Europe."

Although Komisarjevsky usually designed the productions he directed, the Theatre Guild engaged Lee Simonson, an American designer. The relationship between Simonson and Komisarjevsky was successful, and they are known to have collaborated on the set design for *The Tidings Brought to Mary*. Their collaboration continued with their joint authorship of *Settings and Costumes of the Modern Stage*. Besides Paul Claudel's *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, Komisarjevsky directed for the Theatre Guild Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, and A. A. Milne's *The Lucky One*. According to Orville Larson, an historian of modern stage design, *Tidings* was the first American production to use lighting design techniques developed by the Swiss innovator, Adolphe Appia. Komisarjevsky's innovative staging, sensitivity to the style of the text, and avant-garde lighting and stage design pleased New York audiences and critics.

Kenneth MacGowan, writing in *Theatre Arts Magazine*, 7 (1923), 99–101, described the productions:

The Tidings Brought to Mary:

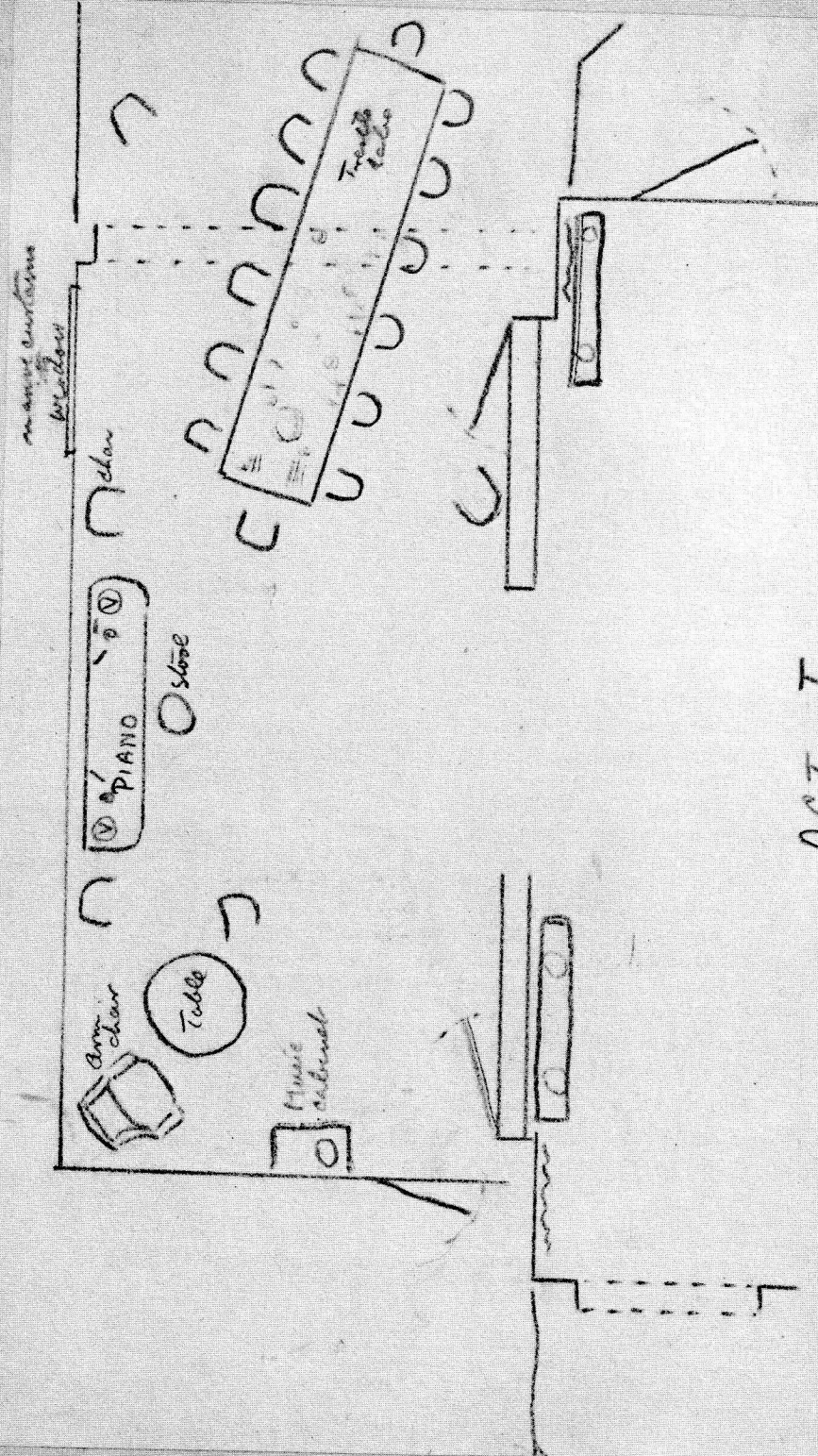
Lee Simonson and Theodore Komisarjevsky, the Guild's Russian director, quite abandoned the actual. The curtain never separated audience and stage The setting developed as an arrangement of plastic surfaces backed by a golden sky. The breaks in the action, the change of scenes, were indicated by nuns who filed out from the side portals, prayed for a moment, lit candles, or covered the block with a table cloth Played upon by slowly changing lights, the whole thing, actors, steps, costumes, and colors became a pattern dictated by the play and interpreted by the director and the artist. And it was utterly artificial and of the theatre In *The Tidings Brought to Mary* we have our first purely presentational (as against representational) performance

Peer Gynt:

Somewhere between permanence and illusion—and rather near to expressionism—lies the production of *Peer Gynt* made by Komisarjevsky as director and Lee Simonson as decorator In the foreground stood conventionalized rocks throughout the Norwegian scenes, even in the Troll King's palace, while between them more realistic objects such as fences and houses, identified the spots A triumph all told, for Simonson, and a revival that really reanimated a great and curious play through the youth of Schildkraut and the color and vividness of setting and costumes.

Overleaf: Number 45. The first opening from Komisarjevsky's promptbook for the Barnes Theatre production of *The Three Sisters* (1926), showing the diagram of the stage and the director's notes and revisions to the text.

40. Scenes from *The Tidings Brought to Mary* by Paul Claudel (Theatre Guild, Garrick Theatre, New York, 1923). 2 photographs.
41. Joseph Schildkraut as Peer and Selena Royle as Solveig in *Peer Gynt* (Theatre Guild, Garrick Theatre, New York, 1923). Photograph. Gift of Frank C. Brown, 31 August 1943.
42. Joseph Schildkraut in the title role of *Peer Gynt* (Theatre Guild, Garrick Theatre, New York, 1923). Photograph. Gift of Frank C. Brown, 31 August 1943.
43. Selena Royle as Solveig, Francene Wouters as Helga and Joseph Schildkraut as Peer in *Peer Gynt* (Theatre Guild, Garrick Theatre, New York, 1923). Photograph by Francis Bruguière.
44. Program for *Peer Gynt* (Theatre Guild, Garrick Theatre, New York, 1923).



ACT I

BEGINNERS

Discovered

{ OLGA
MASHA
IRINA

OFF L.

{ BARON
DOCTOR
SALYONY

ACT I

May 1870

In the house of the PROZOROVs. A drawing-room with columns beyond which a large room is visible. Mid-day; it is bright and sunny. The table in the further room is being laid for lunch.

OLGA, in the dark blue uniform of a high-school teacher, is correcting exercise books, at times standing still and then walking up and down; MASHA, in a black dress, with her hat on her knee, is reading a book; IRINA, in a white dress, is standing plunged in thought.

seated bench
down L.

up R at table

seated R
behind easel

OLGA: Just a year has passed since father's death:

in and
will
knives forks
bring to her
shelp
arrange
table

~~OLGA. Father~~ ^{He} died just a year ago, on this very day—the fifth of May, ~~your name day, Irina.~~ It was very cold, snow was falling. I ~~felt as though I should not live through it; you lay fainting as though you were dead.~~ But now a year has passed and we can think of it calmly. ~~you are already in a white dress, your face is radiant.~~ (The clock strikes twelve.) The clock was striking then too (a pause). I remember the band playing and the firing at the cemetery as they carried the coffin. ~~Though he was a general in command of a brigade, yet there weren't many people there.~~ It was raining, though. Heavy rain and snow. ~~of course it was very cold & rainy~~

PAUSE

CLOCK
STRIKE
12

RUSSIAN DRAMA ON THE ENGLISH STAGE

Between the years 1925 and 1936, Komisarjevsky produced all of Chekhov's full-length plays on the English stage. He successfully presented them as popular drama and revolutionized the English perception of Russian theatre. In fact, critics were so pleased with these extraordinary productions that they persuaded the London theatre audiences to travel beyond the West End to the Barnes Theatre in the London suburb of Hammersmith, a converted cinema stage under the management of Philip Ridgeway. The 1926 season of Russian drama at the Barnes began with Chekhov's *Ivanov*, a play Komisarjevsky had originally produced in December 1925 under the auspices of the Stage Society at the Duke of York's Theatre. Three Chekhov plays followed in rapid succession: *Uncle Vanya* in January 1926 (starring Boris Ranevsky as Serebryakov and Jean Forbes-Robertson as Sonia); *The Three Sisters* in February (starring Mary Sheridan as Olga and John Gielgud as Tusenbach, revived in October 1927 with Martita Hunt as Olga and Charles Laughton as Solyony); and *The Cherry Orchard*, in October 1926 (starring Dorothy Dix as Madame Ranevsky and Charles Laughton as Epikhodov). Two other Russian pieces, Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* and Leonid Andreyev's *Katerina*, staged between February and October, interrupted the Chekhov cycle. The small stage and limited budget of the Barnes demanded imagination and ingenuity. For each play, Komisarjevsky devised a transmutable set that could be used throughout the production. The best example of this was seen in *The Government Inspector* for which Komisarjevsky created a rotating stage set. Cora Jarrett described the staging in *Theatre Arts Magazine*, 10 (1926), 709:

The gaily irrational design is like a high wind in the sails of the play; the fantastic turn-table room, with its skeleton door and windows, from which the personages of Gogol lean out when the room turns its outside to the street, and through which they lean in when the turn-table turns again, and the room is an interior, belongs to a world in which anything may happen. Framed in this witty and artificial stage picture, the scenes glitter as if through a colored window; the whole play rings on the ear differently, and with less bitterness in the satire, no doubt, than was the author's intention. But that sort of white magic, when a man can work it, justifies itself.

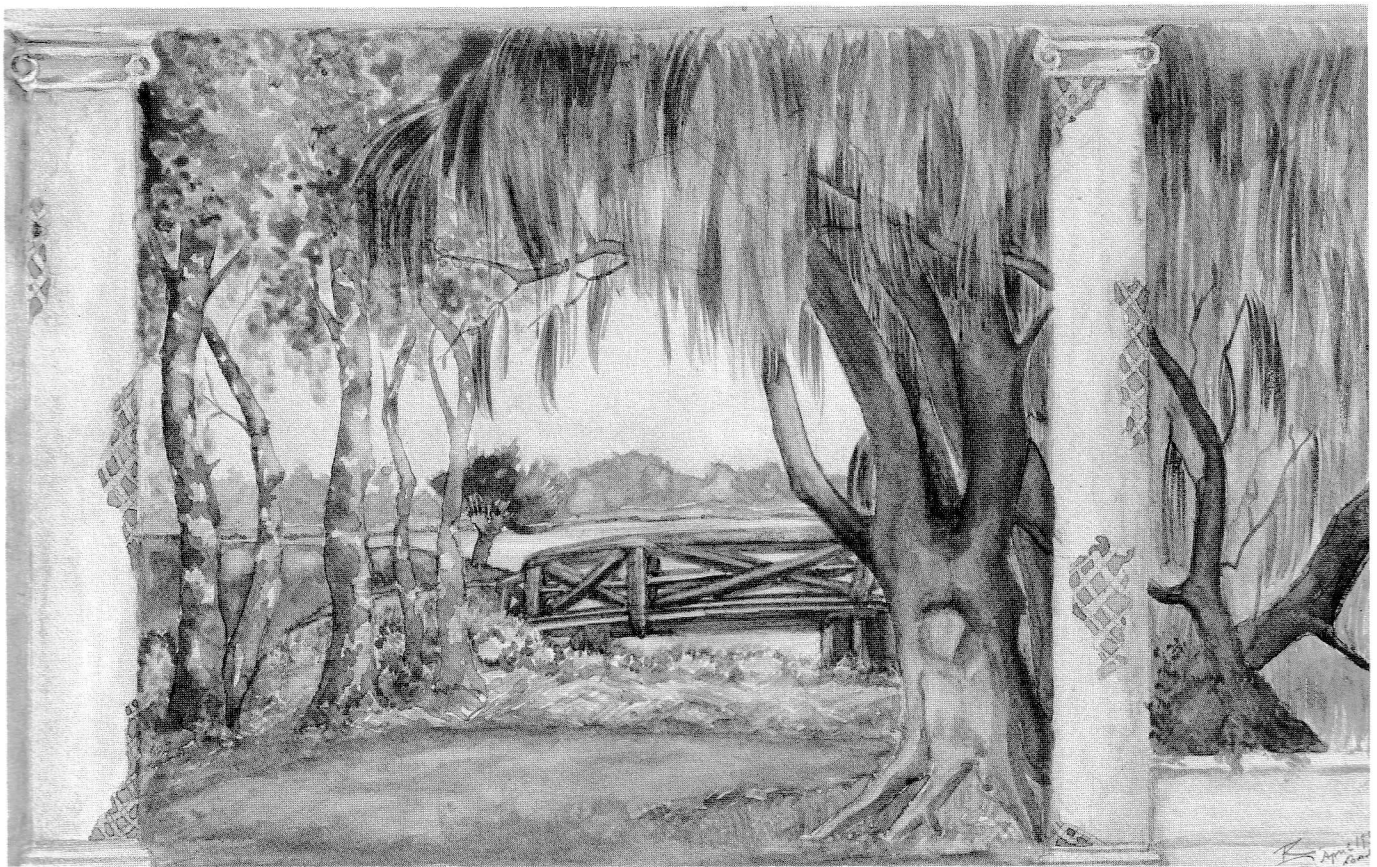
In order to make Chekhov's dramas fit the expectations of English audiences, Komisarjevsky took some liberties with the text—not something for which he was criticized, because the critics were generally unfamiliar with Chekhov. According to theatre historian Victor Emeljanow, Komisarjevsky shifted the characterization of at least one character in each play to create a romantic lead. In *Uncle Vanya*, Astrov the doctor turned from bumpkin to Byron; in *The Three Sisters*, Tusenbach became a *jeune premier*; and in *The Seagull*, Trigorin was portrayed as a suave dilettante.

In 1936, Komisarjevsky completed his Chekhov productions with *The Seagull*, starring Peggy Ashcroft as Nina, Edith Evans as Arcadina, and John Gielgud as Trigorin, at the New Theatre, London.

The Three Sisters

45. Anton Chekhov (1860-1904). *The Three Sisters* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923), translated by Constance Garnett. Promptbook for Theodore Komisarjevsky's production at the Barnes Theatre, London, February 1926.

Constance Garnett's translation is pasted into a copy book and annotated



with stage directions and textual changes. A diagram of the stage is included. The textual changes and additions show Komisarjevsky's liberal revising.

46. Program for *The Three Sisters* (Barnes Theatre, London, 1926)
47. John Gielgud (1904–1990). Autograph letter to Komisarjevsky (London, 8 July 1938).

Gielgud produced *The Three Sisters* for his 1937–1938 season at the Queen's Theatre. He invited Komisarjevsky to direct the production as a reprise of the great Barnes Theatre success in which Gielgud had starred. Komisarjevsky, however, declined. The production was directed by Michel St. Denis and starred Peggy Ashcroft as Irina. Gielgud wrote:

I know [St. Denis] will not give anything like such beauty to the production you did—and I shall always think with love and admiration of that Barnes performance—but he is an interesting producer and very good to work with—I believe he might do something quite different and stimulating in a different way.

The Seagull

48. Anton Chekhov (1860–1904). *The Seagull*, acting version and translation by Theodore Komisarjevsky, 1936. Typescript with manuscript annotations. Promptbook for Theodore Komisarjevsky's production at New Theatre, London, May, 1936.
49. Theodore Komisarjevsky (1882–1954). Stage design for *The Seagull* (New Theatre, London, 1936). Watercolor on board; 37.5 x 59.5 cm.

Number 49. Stage design by Komisarjevsky for his New Theatre, London production of the *Seagull* (1936). For this setting Komisarjevsky chose a pallet of sea blues and greens, and faded browns. Watercolor on board.



Number 52. Scene from *The Government Inspector*, illustrating the rotating stage set. Claude Rains, shown here wearing a top hat, starred in this 1926 production.

50. Scene from *The Seagull* (New Theatre, London, 1936). Photograph by Houston Rogers.

Peggy Ashcroft in the role of Nina is shown in the center of the photograph. Ashcroft starred as Irina in Komisarjevsky's production of *The Three Sisters* and played as well several roles in other Komisarjevsky productions. The two were married from 1934 to 1937.

51. John Gielgud, (1904–1990). Autograph letter to Komisarjevsky (London, [1936]).

Gielgud left *The Seagull* after six weeks to play Hamlet in the United States. Upon leaving the production he wrote Komisarjevsky:

... I do hope to work again with you on another play soon when I come back. Do let me know if you read anything that appeals to you that might be suitable for me to play in. I have loved Trigorin and shall be very sad to leave the part. You have helped me so much to get more reality and subtlety again—big theatres and too much Shakespeare make me tired and then I get so cheap and declamatory. I'm sure what I have learned in this part should be invaluable to working at Hamlet again.

The Government Inspector

52. Scene from *The Government Inspector*, depicting the stage design by Komisarjevsky (Barnes Theatre, London, 1926). Photograph by Lenare. Gift of George Zournas and Rosamond Gilder, 15 January 1986.

Komisarjevsky had staged *The Government Inspector*, starring Claude Rains, at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1920, during his first theatrical season in London. Rains appeared also in the 1926 Barnes production alongside Charles Laughton.

53. Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852). *The Government Inspector*, arranged by Theodore Komisarjevsky (London, 1926). Typescript with manuscript annotations. Komisarjevsky's promptbook for the 1926 production at the Barnes Theatre.

The manuscript notes show the location of the "turn-table" platform room at the moment the curtain opened and the actors arrived on stage.

KOMISARJEVSKY AND SHAKESPEARE

By the time Komisarjevsky began his work at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1932, he was better known in England as a progressive director of Russian drama than as a Shakespearean. He had, however, also put on a very popular *King Lear* for the Oxford University Dramatic Society in 1927. Komisarjevsky's experience with directing Shakespeare had also included two Moscow productions, *The Tempest* and a production of Nicolai's operatic version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Between 1932 and 1939, Theodore Komisarjevsky produced seven Shakespeare plays for the British stage, six for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. They attracted criticism, but his Shakespearean productions also drew crowds. The plays were *The Merchant of Venice* (1932, revived 1933), *Macbeth* (1933), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1935, revived 1936), *King Lear* (1936, revived 1937), *The Comedy of Errors* (1938, revived 1939), and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1939). In addition, he staged *Antony and Cleopatra* for the commercial stage at the New Theatre, London, in 1936.

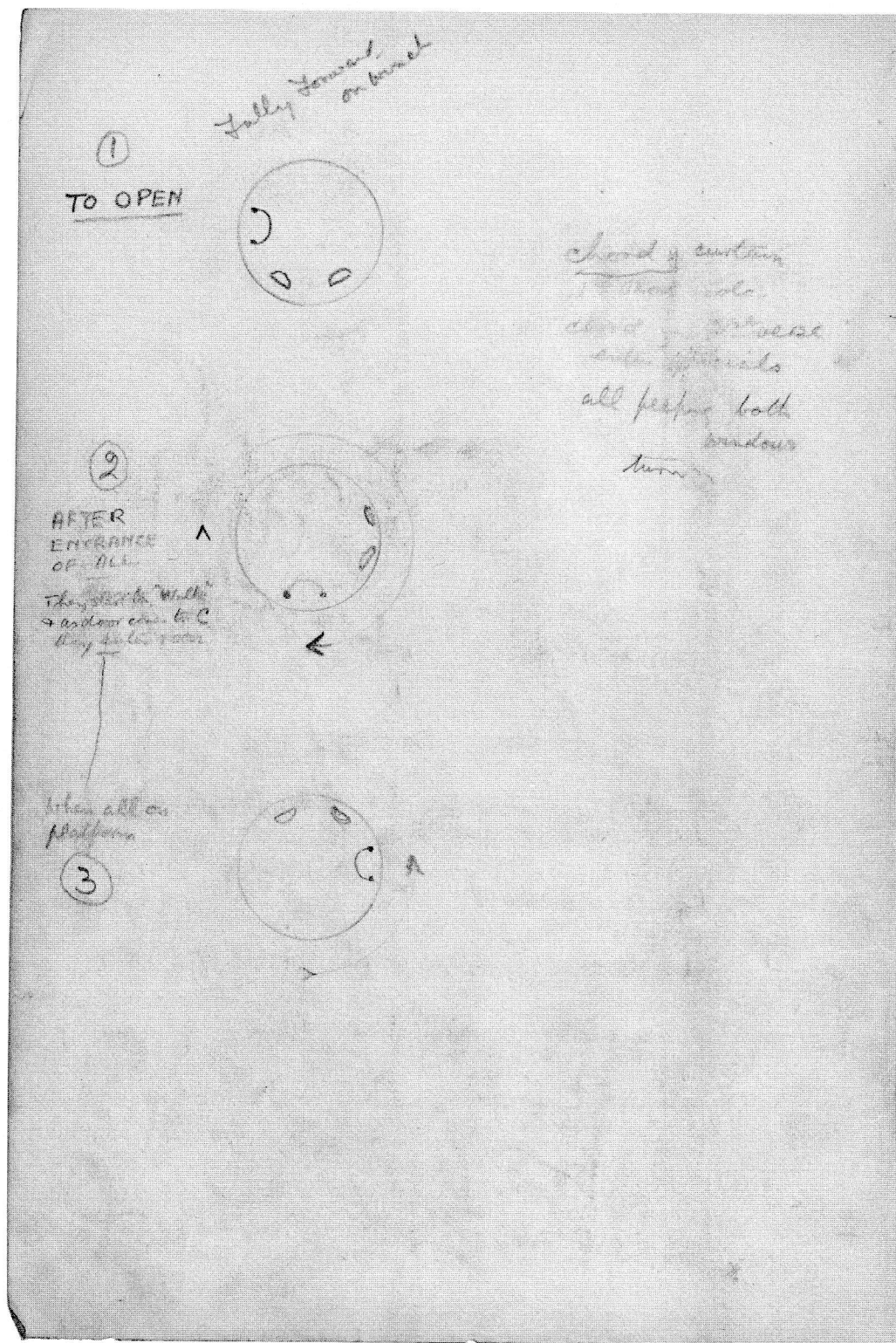
When Komisarjevsky produced *The Merchant of Venice* at the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1932, his changes to the text and locale of the play horrified purists, who considered his comical treatment of the tragedy to be fantastic and frivolous. His changes in the comedies, however, proved more palatable. He staged *The Comedy of Errors* in a toyland of pink bowler hats and doll-like figures, brought a festive satirical spirit to *The Taming of the Shrew*, and set *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in sixteenth-century Vienna.

Komisarjevsky's work at Stratford might have had more immediate influence had the Second World War not erupted. In Switzerland when Britain declared war, Komisarjevsky soon after moved his family to the United States.

The Merchant of Venice

Komisarjevsky's 1932 production of *The Merchant of Venice*, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's first production by a guest director, was, despite mixed reviews, a box-office success that the theatre greatly needed. An unexpected problem was the set. Designed to make use of the state-of-the-art machinery in Stratford's newly built theatre, it was intended to change quickly, in full view of the audience. It changed in full view, but laboriously. This mishap notwithstanding, the production succeeded, and Komisarjevsky's comic interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* was revived at Stratford in 1933.

Number 53. Komisarjevsky's typescript promptbook for his Barnes Theatre production of *The Government Inspector* (1926), with diagram depicting the shifting locations of players on the rotating platform.



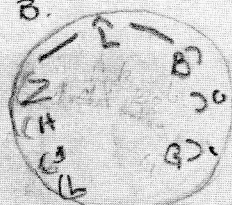
54. Stage settings for *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1932). 4 photographs.

From R.

Judge
Luka
Char.
Hob.
Hob.

Luka
Hob.
Z.
B.

TO OPEN 1



THE
GOVERNMENT
INSPECTOR.

(REVIZOR)

ACT I.

Scene 1.

Gov. from L

all stand together
bus. sitting 2 & H.

When all on - Turn door to L.

~~THE GOVERNOR, the CHARITY
COMMISSIONER, the INSPECTOR OF
SCHOOLS, the JUDGE, the POLICE
SUPERINTENDENT, the DOCTOR, two
POLICE OFFICERS.~~

4 Call

Governor

I have called you together, gentlemen to receive
a very unpleasant piece of news: there's a
Government Inspector coming.

Judge &

Char. Com.

What? A Government Inspector?

Governor

Yes, an Inspector from Petersburg, incognito.
With secret instructions, too.

Judge

Well, I declare!

Luka

Good Lord! And with secret instructions too!

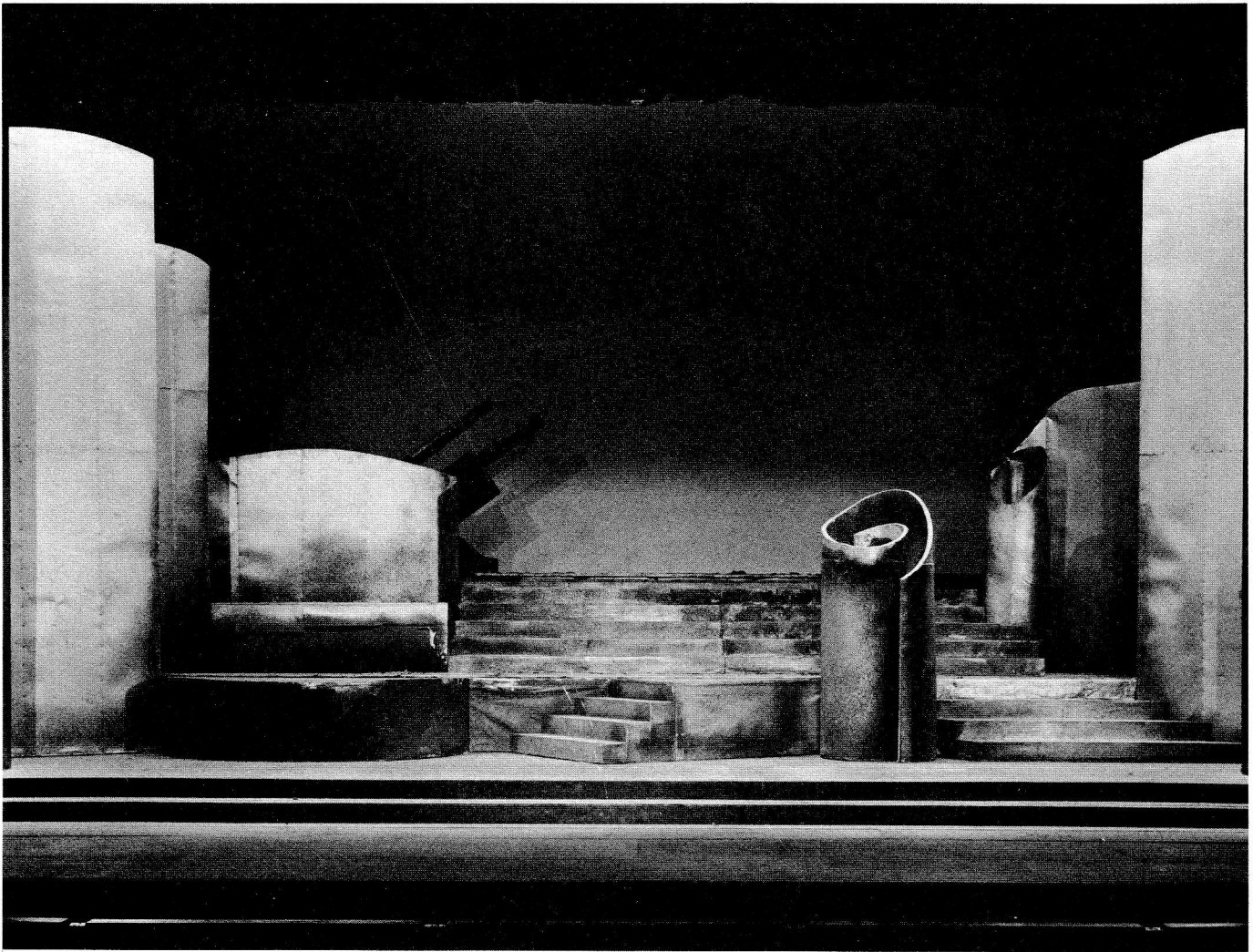
Governor

I had a sort of presentiment of it: all last
night I dreamt about two rats of an extraordinary
size. Upon my word, I never saw the like of them
- black! of unnatural size! They came, snuffed
about - and vanished.... Here's a letter which
I will read you from Chmikov! YOU know him (to
the Charity Commissioner) This is what he says:
"My dear friend, godfather to my children, and
benefactor..... (He mutters over quickly the first
few sentences) and to let you know" - Ah!
that's it -- "I hasten to let you know, amongst

He just
slept
bus.
out loud, not
set L.
Luka

Macbeth

55. Stage design for *Macbeth*, labelled "Part II" (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1933). Charcoal, silver crayon, and wash; 43 x 65 cm. Loan of Tanya Komisarjevsky Metaksa.



Number 56. Stage scenery designed by Komisarjevsky for *Macbeth* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1933). The remarkable set was constructed of aluminum.

56. Photographs of stage scenery designed by Komisarjevsky for his production of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1933). 4 photographs by Logan Birmingham.

The set, constructed of aluminum, consisted of adjustable screens, scrolls, and platforms. The witches appeared only once on stage and thereafter were seen projected on the back curtain.

The Merry Wives Of Windsor

Komisarjevsky set his 1935 Stratford production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in Vienna and costumed his characters in a colorful palet of bright pink, fuschia, and purple. The *London Times* looked unfavorably upon the production: "To show how independent [the play] may be made of English character and English humour he gives it a Viennese background and imposes on the actors the artificiality that would be appropriate of a Goldoni comedy" (18 April 1935). The sets were also brightly painted, and the fast pace of the production contributed to one reviewer feeling that the general atmosphere resembled "an Offenbach opera; indeed, some of the speeches were spoken as recitative to music."

57. Costume design for Slender. Pastel and pencil; 26.2 x 18.2 cm.

58. Costume design for Justice Shallow. Pastel and pencil; 26.3 x 18.1 cm.
59. Costume design for Mr. Page. Pastel and pencil; 26.2 x 18.2 cm.
60. Costume design for Nym. Pastel and pencil; 28.1 x 18.4 cm.
61. Costume design for Falstaff in disguise. Pastel and pencil; 26 x 21 cm.
62. Costume design for Bardolph. Pastel and pencil; 27.2 x 18.7 cm.
63. Permanent stage setting for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1935). 2 photographs by Ernest Daniels.
The second photo shows the permanent setting with additional stage pieces to transform the scene into a forest.
64. Program for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, April-September, 1935).
65. W. H. Savery. Autograph letter to Theodore Komisarjevsky (Stratford-upon-Avon, 26 April 1935).

The letter praises Komisarjevsky's work on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: "I personally loved the show, & if only I could find a backer & you were agreeable, I would at once start a "KomisTheatre" in London & do nothing but your productions"

King Lear

66. Costume notebook for *King Lear* (New Theatre, Oxford University Dramatic Society, Oxford, 1927).
Komisarjevsky's notes indicate that he based his designs on Ford Maddox Brown's painting *Cordelia's Portion*, which he described as "Barbaric, VI century. But simple, stylized." The costumes were to be made of material without ornament, and the cloaks, robes, and scarves were each to be in different solid colors. The Oxford University Dramatic Society (O.U.D.S.) production was played without scenery other than stairs, a platform and a "semi-circular gold cloth round the stage, upon which cloth a highly ingenious lighting system project[ed] each scene cinema wise" (*The Daily Chronicle*, 15 February 1927).
67. William Shakespeare (1564-1616). *King Lear* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), The Tudor Shakespeare, Virginia C. Gildersleeve, editor. Director's preparation copy in Komisarjevsky's hand, heavily annotated in pencil with cuts, stage business, and diagrams. Used for both the O.U.D.S. production, 1927, and for the Stratford-upon-Avon production, 1936.
68. Komisarjevsky's manuscript rehearsal notes for *King Lear* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1936).
69. Scene from Act I of *King Lear* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1936). Photograph by Ernest Daniels.

Randle Ayrton played Lear in Komisarjevsky's Stratford production of the tragedy. A reviewer of the day described the single set it featured: "The whole stage is occupied by stairs, put at different angles, with platforms on which the action takes place When the light first shone on the throned King, trumpeters blew a wild barbaric blast" (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 21 April 1936).

Antony and Cleopatra

70. Advertisement for Komisarjevsky's production of *Antony and Cleopatra*.
71. Komisarjevsky rehearsing *Antony and Cleopatra* (New Theatre, London, 1936). Photograph.

Komisarjevsky's only commercial Shakespearean production, *Antony and Cleopatra*, staged at the New Theatre, London, in 1936, and starring the Russian actress Eugenie Leontovich, proved so controversial that it damaged Komisarjevsky's reputation. The headline for James Agate's review in the *Times* read: "Anton and Cleopatra: A Tragedy by Komispeare." Leontovich had great difficulty with the English Shakespearean verse, and both Komisarjevsky and Leontovich were attacked as "foreigners" and "charlatans." Stratford, fortunately, stood by Komisarjevsky; in 1938 he again directed at the Shakespeare Festival. This time, his *Comedy of Errors* was a critical success.

The Comedy Of Errors

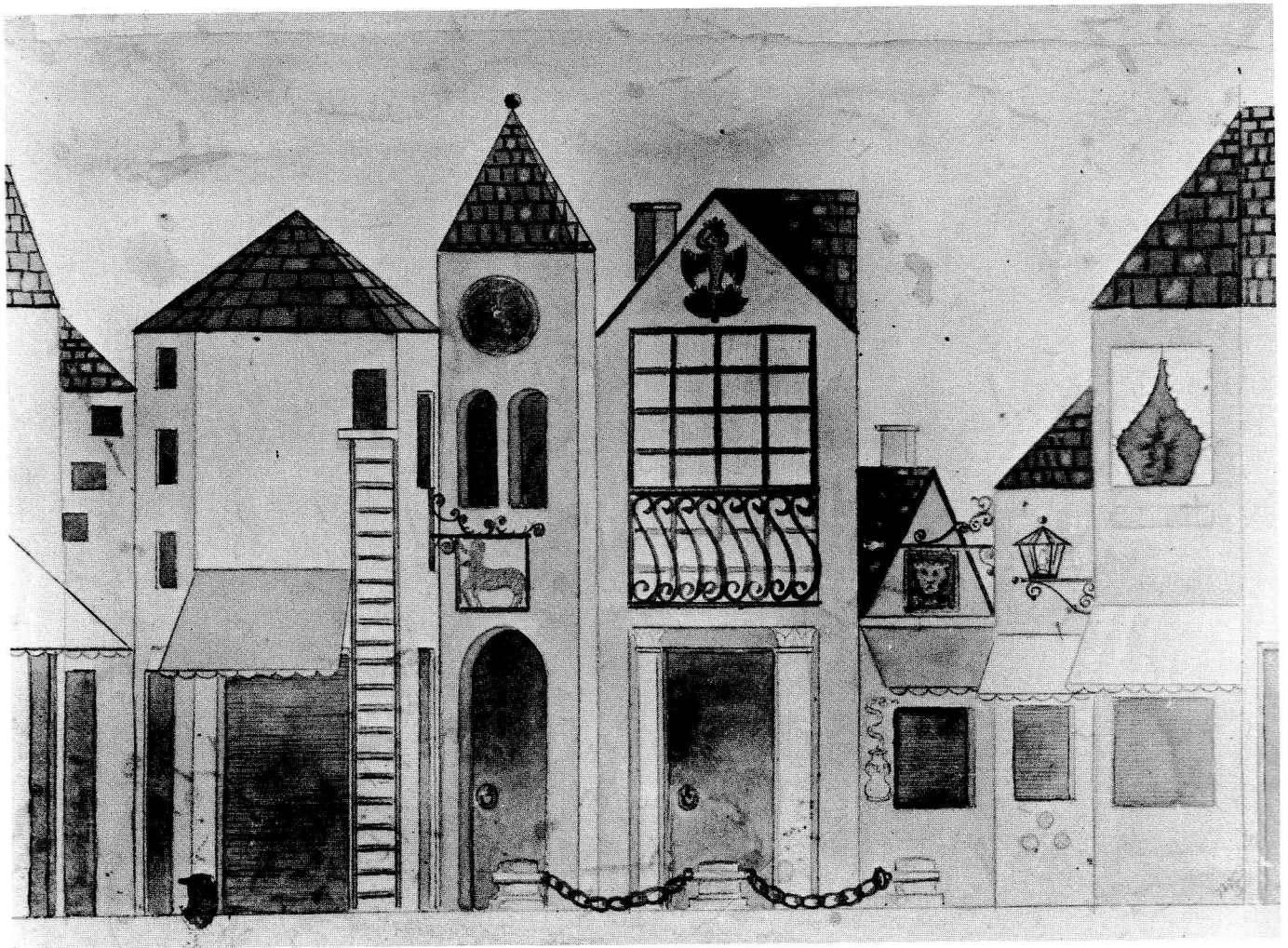
72. William Shakespeare (1564-1616). *The Comedy of Errors* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), The Tudor Shakespeare, F. M. Padelford, editor.

Komisarjevsky's preparation copy, heavily annotated, includes notes on the pantomime added by him at the beginning of Act I. Throughout there are directions concerning a comic detail of the set: the clock bell was to strike a time contrary to that on the clock's face and the clock hands rush to catch up. Portions of the text were to be delivered as recitative, and single speeches were broken up into parts for several characters.

73. Manuscript notes for the opening pantomime of *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1938).

Komisarjevsky's notes indicate the beats to be used for each action in the opening pantomime. Komisarjevsky created "an Ephesus of dolls' house quaintness . . . [a] proper scene of eternal pantomime and harlequinade. Its citizens appear as puppets and playboys bound to no especial century, but heirs of a timeless invention" (Ivor Brown writing in *The Observer*, 17 April 1938). Several of the costume designs, notably those for Nell and the four officers, were based on dolls of Komisarjevsky's own family.

74. Stage design for *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1938). Watercolor; 31 x 43 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
75. Designs for Duke's Attendant, Inn Proprietor, and two Ladies. Watercolor; 31 x 43 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.



76. Designs for Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus. Watercolor; 37 x 26 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

Number 74. Watercolor stage design for *The Comedy of Errors* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1938).

77. Designs for Adriana, Luciana, Aemilia, and a Courtesan. Watercolor; 37 x 26 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

78. Designs for the Officers, Aegeon of Syracuse, Nell, and the Duke. Watercolor; 37 x 26 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

79. Designs for Merchant (goldsmith), Dr. Pinch, Merchant (tailor), and Balthazar. Watercolor; 37 x 26 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

80. Stage set for Komisarjevsky's production of *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1938). 2 photographs by Ernest Daniels.

The Taming of The Shrew

81. Stage settings for *The Taming of the Shrew* designed by Komisarjevsky (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1939). 4 photographs by Ernest Daniels.

Romeo and Juliet

After 1939, the year Komisarjevsky moved to the United States, he continued to stage Shakespeare in his own theatre studio. In addition to a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, he also directed an open-air production of *Cymbeline* in 1950 in Montreal, Canada.

82. Costume for young boy in *Romeo and Juliet* (Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio, New York, 1944). Striped jacket and britches. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
83. Design for Tybalt. Pencil and watercolor; 35 x 21 cm.
84. Design for Mercutio. Charcoal, pencil, and watercolor; 35 x 21 cm.
85. Design for Benvolio. Pencil and watercolor; 35 x 21 cm.

KOMISARJEVSKY AND THE COMMERCIAL THEATRE

During his first decade in London, in 1927, Komisarjevsky had a brief flirtation with the commercial theatre, in the form of a collaboration with Arnold Bennett on an "International Season" at the Court Theatre. His productions drew positive notices from the critics, particularly the opening play, Dmitri Merezhkovski's *Paul I*, which starred George Hayes and Charles Laughton. As Komisarjevsky observed in *Myself and the Theatre*, his enchantment quickly vanished: "First of all the Theatre, because of its aesthetic and intellectual nature, is not and never was a commercial institution. The commercial managers, although they make a pretense of giving the greater public what it wants, merely guess at everybody's taste and of course in most cases wrongly."

The commercial theatre brought Komisarjevsky in contact with actors and actresses who admired his abilities as a director: his insight and precision. As John Gielgud in his autobiographical volume, *Early Stages*, wrote:

Actors love working for Komisarjevsky. He lets them find their own way, watches, keeps silent, then places the phrasing of a scene in a series of pauses, the timing of which he rehearses minutely. Very occasionally he will make some short but illuminating comment, which is immensely significant and easy to remember.

Komisarjevsky's papers reveal numerous instances of actors expressing their gratitude for his inspired directing of them.

86. Dmitri Sergeyevich Merezhkovski (1865-1941). *Paul I*, as performed at the Court Theatre, London, October 1927; adapted by John Alford and J. C.

Dale. Typescript mounted in folio journal. Promptbook marked for light and sound cues with stage diagrams and notes on setting, furnishings, and props.

87. Elizabeth Bergner and Hugh Sinclair in *Escape Me Never* by Margaret Kennedy (Apollo Theatre, London, 1933). Photograph by Sasha. Gift of George Zournas and Rosamond Gilder, 15 January 1986.

88. Fay Compton (1894–1978). Autograph letter to Komisarjevsky (London, 23 December 1926).

Compton starred in Komisarjevsky's production of *Liliom* which, after an out-of-town tour that included Southsea and Liverpool, opened at the Duke of York's Theatre in London, presented by Philip Ridgeway. She writes in this letter: "A thousand thanks Komis . . . I want the play to be an enormous success for all our sakes—but particularly for yours—as its your child really! and you've had all the real work and you've been marvellous."

89. Ivor Novello (1893–1951). Autograph letter to Komisarjevsky (Portsmouth, 1926?).

Novello, who played the title role in Komisarjevsky's *Liliom*, writes: "I have never been more happy—I hope for many more productions . . ."

90. Charles Laughton (1899–1962). Autograph letter to Komisarjevsky (1928?).

Laughton's letter reveals that Komisarjevsky forced his actors to think about their responsibility not to pursue a solely commercial career but instead to push themselves beyond that into more artistically fertile ground.

I desire and fear but I believe my desire for the new is stronger than my fear. In all of my work I have wished to please and when I spoke in that view I was perhaps thinking that if we please we live and if we do not we die. I was thinking . . . of hoped for future productions of the classics. But dear master I do not come to you with the intention of trying to hinder you . . .

INTERIOR DESIGNS FOR MOVIE PALACES

Komisarjevsky designed the interiors for twenty-two cinemas for the Granada chain between 1927 and 1939, so large a number that the aesthetic of Komisarjevsky was seen by virtually every London movie-goer. His work for the entertainment entrepreneur Sidney Bernstein (now Lord Bernstein) included the interior of the Phoenix Theatre, Charing Cross Road, an Italian Renaissance palace of highly dramatic effect, the Granada Dover and the Granada Walthamstow, both in the Moorish style, the Granada Tooting in medieval Gothic, and a reconstruction of the old Empire Theatre, Edmonton, in an entirely modern style. In these theatres Komisarjevsky used his scenic vision to create highly theatrical effects, thus adding another aspect to a career that was already notable for its versatility.

91. Ticket booths at the entrance of the Phoenix Theatre, Charing Cross Road, 1930. Photograph by Sims and Co.

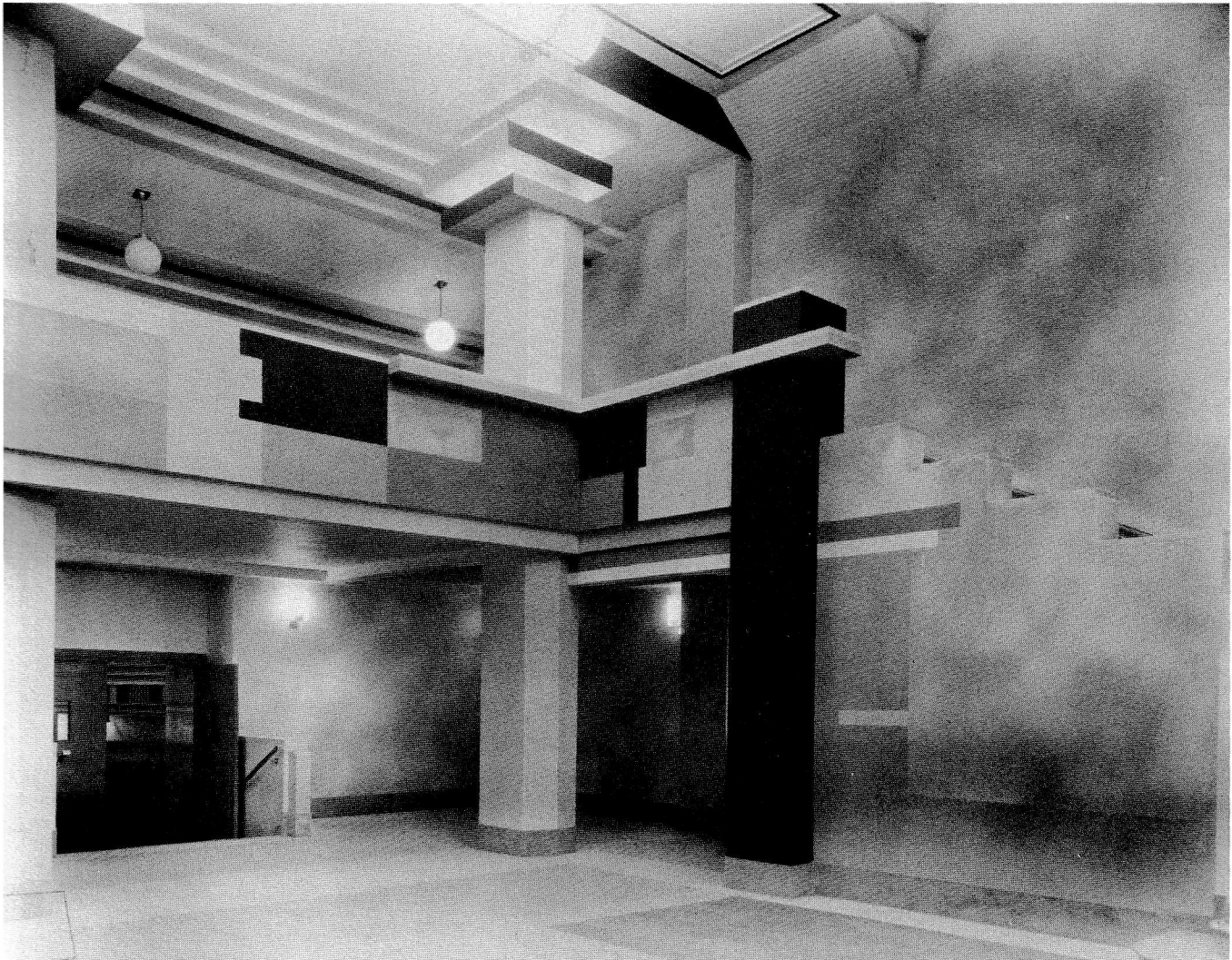
92. Auditorium of the Granada Theatre, Tooting, 1931. 2 photographs by Sims and Co.
93. Interior of the Empire Theatre, Edmonton, 1933. 2 photographs.

The publicity described the interior of this Bernstein cinema as "ultra-modern The decorative scheme . . . is notable for its simplicity and bold colours. Six colours—blue, grey, broken white, dark brown, red and yellow—are employed in the Foyer and six in the Auditorium—buff, green, pink, silver, grey and red."
94. Program for the opening of the Phoenix Theatre, Charing Cross, 1930. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
95. Applique design for cinema curtain (London, n.d.). Watercolor, ink, and pencil; 27.5 x 37 cm.

KOMISARJEVSKY IN THE UNITED STATES

- Although Komisarjevsky had worked in the United States with the Theatre Guild in the early twenties, had staged a musical, *Revenge with Music*, at the New Amsterdam Theatre in 1934, and had gone on lecture tours in 1936 and 1938, his name was still little known to the New York theatre world when he emigrated in 1939. Then aged 57, Komisarjevsky had to establish himself for the third time in his career. He began by setting up a school of drama and dance with his wife, Ernestine Stodelle. In addition to his work at the Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio, he taught at Yale University and directed several productions for the New York City Opera.
96. Business card of Theodore Komisarjevsky and brochure for the Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio in New York (ca. 1940).
 97. Stage design for *The Cherry Orchard* (Yale University Theatre, New Haven, 1941). Watercolor and pencil; 28 x 34 cm.
 98. Scenes from *The Cherry Orchard* (Yale University Theatre, New Haven, 1941). 2 photographs.
 99. Program for *The Cherry Orchard* (Yale University Theatre, New Haven, 1941).

Komisarjevsky served on the drama faculty of Yale University as a lecturer with the rank of assistant professor during the academic years 1940–41 and 1941–42.
 100. Costume worn by Tanya Komisarjevsky in the role of Louison in Molière's *La Malade imaginaire* (Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio, New York, ca. 1945). Gold bodice with rose velvet skirt. Loan of Naomi Komisarjevsky.
 101. Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805). *Mary Stuart* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1898), translated from the German with an introduction by Edward Brooks,



Jr. Komisarjevsky's working copy with numerous textual changes. Gift of Tanya Komisarjevsky Metaksa, 1987.

The Dances of Ernestine Stodelle

102. Costume designed for the dance "Homage to Isadora Duncan" (Premiere, Ecole Normale de Musique, Paris, 25 March 1939). Rust silk toga with gold embroidery and purple silk scarf. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
103. Costume designed for the dance "La Vivandière," part of a suite of four dances on the French theme to the music of Jacques Offenbach (Ecole Normale de Musique, Paris, 25 March 1939). Blue and mauve wool jacket and skirt with silk lining; wool hat with gold braid and tassel.

In this dance, Stodelle, as *la vivandière*, served wine to the troops. Her belt and buckles came from a military costumer in Paris, and she performed the dance in matching tights with white spats and black patent-leather shoes. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

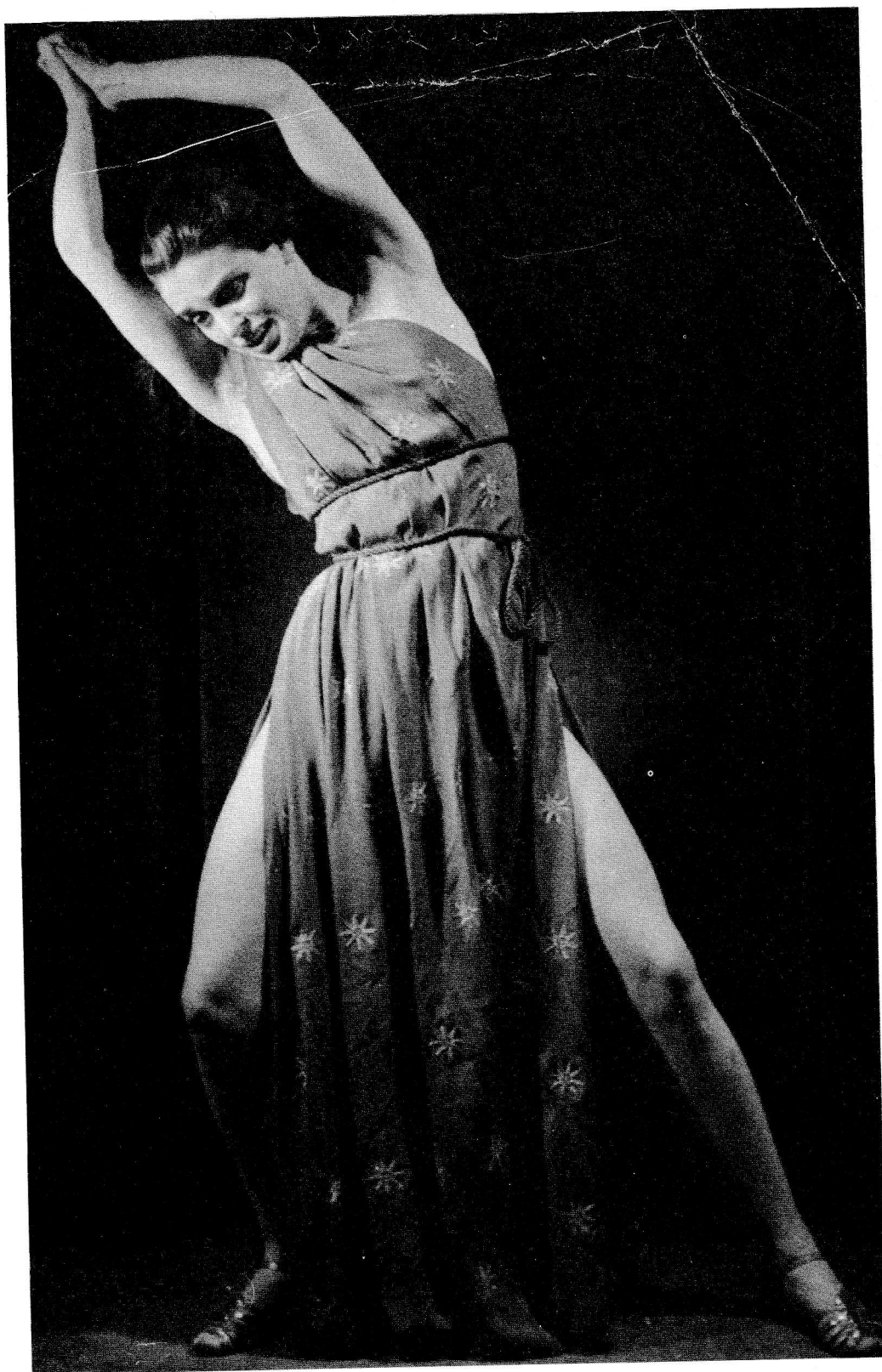
Number 93. "Ultra-modern" interior of the Empire Theatre cinema, designed by Komisarjevsky in 1933. The foyer was colored in blue, grey, broken white, dark brown, red and yellow.

104. Costume designed for the dance "Tempo di Ballo," choreographed to music by Domenico Scarlatti (Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio, New York, 1940). Pink silk jacquard bodice with white tulle skirt. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
105. Costume for the role of The Veiled Lady performed by Stodelle in Komisarjevsky's production of Molière's *Don Juan* (Lincoln Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut, 1942). Magenta taffeta with green velvet and blue satin sleeves and green and yellow ribbon; yellow satin hat with feather. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
106. Costume designed for a dance choreographed to Bach's *Komm süßer Tod* (Norwalk, Connecticut, 1944). Silver bodice with blue skirt and pink satin inner sleeves. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
107. Ernestine Stodelle, performing "Homage to Isadora Duncan" (Ecole Normale de Musique, Paris, 25 March 1939) in a costume designed by Theodore Komisarjevsky (see no. 102). Photograph by Theodore Komisarjevsky. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
108. Program for dance recital by Ernestine Stodelle (Ecole Normale de Musique, Paris, 25 March 1939). Komisarjevsky directed the program and designed the costumes worn by Stodelle. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
109. Theodore Komisarjevsky (1882–1954). Autograph letter to his wife, Ernestine Stodelle (London, 13 March [1939]). Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.
 Komisarjevsky offers instructions for revising the construction of his design for Stodelle's costume for her dance, "Variety 1900": "I looked at your Valse dress and saw that the neck is too high in the front and that it gives you a bosom. Ask the couturière to *cut it lower, like this in front . . . I'm off tomorrow for Stratford Love & kisses Husband.*"
110. Invitation and program for dance recital (Komisarjevsky Theatre Studio, New York, 1940).

KOMISARJEVSKY AND OPERA

Komisarjevsky's theories of synthesis in the theatre were best served by the operatic format: "I came to the conclusion that opera, because it can combine all the expressions of the actor's art—movement, speech, singing—could be the most perfect form of Theatrical art, and have the most powerful appeal to the public." In 1927 he produced two operas for the Teatro di Torino: *Così Fan Tutte* and *Fata Malerba*, of which he was enormously proud. Though he had mounted a number of operas in Russia, his work in opera in Europe remained limited, partly because he disliked the "star" mentality and the inevitable lack of rehearsal time.

Komisarjevsky returned to opera in the late 1940s, after his move to the United States, and staged several works for the New York City Opera under the musical direction of Laszlo Halasz. Not only was this a return to opera



Number 107. Ernestine Stodelle, Komisarjevsky's third wife, performing "Homage to Isadora Duncan" (Paris, 1939) in a costume designed by her husband. Photograph by Theodore Komisarjevsky.

but also a return to his theatrical roots. Vladimir Rosing, with whom he had previously worked when he first arrived in London in 1920, took over Komisarjevsky's production of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* when Komisarjevsky became ill during rehearsals. Komisarjevsky also collabo-

rated with scenic designer Mstislav Dobujinsky, with whom he had first worked at Vera Kommissarzhevskaya's Dramatic Theatre in Russia. Thus, Komisarjevsky's career came full circle, his days in the Russian theatre being linked via London and New York in the persons of Rosing and Dobujinsky. Together, the three Russian expatriates staged "synthetic" operas in the theatre of New York, Komisarjevsky's final productions.

111. Production notes for the staging of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (New York City Center, New York City Opera Company, 1952). Typescript with manuscript additions.

112. Rough sketch of stage design for *Wozzeck*. Pencil; 11.5 x 21 cm.

Mstislav Dobujinsky designed the sets and costumes for this production, though this rough sketch may represent an expression of Komisarjevsky's wishes. The "unit set" used for the production was widely criticized by reviewers. Virgil Thomson in the New York *Herald Tribune* commented: "The gravest fault of the production seemed to be its visual conception, that is to say, its set and staging. Its set is a unit set, which means that, like all unit sets, it fits completely no single scene of the play."

113. Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949). *Pelléas et Mélisande, drama lyrique en 5 actes et 12 tableaux de Maurice Maeterlinck; musique de Claude Debussy* (Paris: A. Durand & Fils, 1907). Komisarjevsky's prompt score for the New York City Opera production of 1948.

Notes on the cast list of the score suggest that Komisarjevsky used the copy of the score that had served for his sister's production of the opera forty-one years earlier in 1907.

114. Plan for the setting of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (New York City Center, New York City Opera Company, 1948). Pencil on graph paper; 21.5 x 28 cm.

On this occasion the New York City Opera did not engage Dobujinsky to design the settings, and the program notes describe the production as "devised and directed by" Komisarjevsky. The production toured to the Chicago Civic Opera House where a critic for the Chicago *Daily Tribune* wrote, "At first glimpse, Theodore Komisarjevsky's skeletal setting seems bleak, a little odd. But it is resourceful. It has a tower, a crypt, a terrace, and it responds to lighting." Some reviewers were more accepting of the "unit set" in opera than others.



115. Mstislav Dobujinsky (1875–1957). Costume designs for drunkards in *The Love for Three Oranges* (New York City Opera Company, New York City Center, 1949). 2 drawings: charcoal, crayon, and pencil; 27 x 35 cm. each.
116. Mstislav Dobujinsky (1875–1957). Costume design for horseman in *The Love for Three Oranges* (New York City Opera Company, New York City Center, 1949). Charcoal and watercolor; 28 x 36 cm. Loan of Ernestine S. K. Chamberlain.

Number 115. One of two drawings by Mstislav Dobujinsky (1875–1957) for costumes for drunkards in *The Love for Three Oranges* (New York, 1949).

